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Chairman: Mr. Bussacca ..... (Italy)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 108: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/52/90, A/52/116-S/1997/317, A/52/348, A/52/437, A/52/447-S/1997/775, A/52/482 and A/52/523; A/C.3/52/3)

1. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba) pointed out that the documentation for agenda item 108 had not been published in all the official languages by the date of the current meeting. In the future, the Cuban delegation would be unable to take part in the debates unless the relevant documentation was available in all the official languages at least 48 hours in advance, in accordance with clear General Assembly rules. Since the Geneva office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had been responsible for preparing the documentation, he asked the Chairman to inform that office of the Committee's concern at the delay.

2. **Ms. Quisumbing** (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) apologized for the delay and explained that the understaffed New York Office of the High Commissioner, which had been responsible for ensuring that the documentation was issued on time, had not had the resources to do so, as it was in a situation of near-crisis. She appealed to the delegations to address the need to strengthen the New York Office so that the problem would not recur at the next session.

3. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez** (Cuba) said it was the Geneva office that had been responsible for the substantive preparation of the documents, and thus for the delay in their issuance.

4. **Mr. Otunnu** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children) said that, on the eve of a new millennium, quantum leaps in virtually every field of human endeavour coexisted with a capacity to inflict or to tolerate grave injustice, hatred and cruelty. The real measure of a civilization was its human quality, and specifically its treatment of children, who were its most vulnerable members and who represented its future.

5. Children in situations of armed conflict were being killed, maimed, sexually abused, orphaned, deprived of education and health and forced to become instruments of violence. Most contemporary armed conflicts were fought among compatriots within national borders; they were marked by particularly intense animosities and a tendency to ignore the rules of international humanitarian law. The most damaging loss a society could suffer was the collapse of its value system. Traditional value systems had forbidden attacks on children, women and the elderly in wartime, as well as the destruction of crops, livestock and granary stores, so as to avoid destroying the basis for peaceful coexistence in the future. However, in modern conflicts, enemies sought not only to subdue, but to humiliate or annihilate each other, breaking traditional taboos in a single-minded struggle for power.

6. To restore a sense of ethical rootedness, it was necessary to rebuild a system of values at the local and international levels, first of all by strengthening institutions that inculcated values, such as families, teachers and religious institutions. That local process should be reinforced by the modern legal regimes developed at the international level. Efforts must be made to broaden awareness and application of international human-rights and humanitarian instruments containing provisions designed to protect children, particularly the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1949 Geneva Conventions, together with their Additional Protocols.

7. The Special Representative's agenda for action, as outlined in General Assembly resolution 51/77, was very ambitious. His responsibilities included advocacy to raise international public and official awareness of the plight of children affected by armed conflict; promotion of concerted action by the United Nations system and particularly by its field-level programmes, which had suitable expertise, resources and mandates; construction of partnerships with organizations of civil society; monitoring and assessment of trends which impacted areas related to his mandate; and development of specific actions to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

8. His approach to those responsibilities would be marked by an emphasis on preventive measures and on actions to address the needs of children during, as well as after, armed conflicts; an emphasis on the non-political and impartial nature of his efforts; systematic information-gathering and verification of the facts to enhance the credibility of his work; adoption of a decentralized approach in which the Special Representative acted as a catalyst for the work of United Nations and other organizations and agencies; and selection of priorities within the broad scope of his mandate, to ensure that the projects undertaken were feasible and would produce tangible results.

9. He hoped that all peoples, regardless of political orientation, cultural tradition or religious affiliation, would see the protection and welfare of children as a common denominator and would agree to make the world safer for children in the next millennium.

10. **Ms. Calcetas-Santos** (Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said

that, since the fifty-first session of the General Assembly, she had carried out missions to the United States of America and Kenya, and had addressed the seventh meeting of First Ladies of the Americas. Moreover, the Government of Mexico had invited her to conduct a visit to that country in the coming weeks.

11. She had identified the justice system, the media and education as three catalysts which played a crucial role in relation to the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Since she had already explored the role of the justice system in her preceding report to the General Assembly, her current report (A/52/482) focused on the latter two catalysts, which were interlinked. The report discussed the international legal framework for protecting children from commercial sexual exploitation while respecting their right to education and information, and noted that children's right to such protection sometimes appeared to conflict with the right to freedom of expression.

12. The media discussed in the report included the print media, film, television, radio, the telephone and the Internet. The media's accessibility was a problem; for example, the availability of video cameras to exploiters of children made detection and apprehension virtually impossible. Likewise, the telephone was a useful means of communicating with victims and witnesses of abuse, but was also used for phone-sex operations. The exposure of children to pornography in any form was dangerous, since it could desensitize them and convince them that commercial sex activities were "normal" for children.

13. The report paid special attention to the Internet's role in the commercial sexual exploitation of children. On-line child pornography was dangerous not only to the children it portrayed, but also to children who might view such material. In addition, the possibility that children could provide information or arrange an encounter over the Internet could put them or their families in danger. Effective monitoring schemes involving the cooperation of the computer industry must be devised to prevent children from gaining access to objectionable materials without prejudicing their enjoyment of the educational benefits of the Internet. Such efforts could involve not only Internet service providers and content providers, but also children themselves.

14. The issues surrounding the use of the Internet were so complex that even some studies of the problem had not escaped allegations of abuse, as noted in the report (para. 102). Legal and legislative obstacles must also be overcome in order to make progress in banning pornographic material from the Internet; for example, the Supreme Court of the United States had recently ruled that a federal law which had sought to curb indecency on the Internet was unconstitutional.

15. In her report, she presented a wide range of recommendations which were by no means exhaustive, but which could be helpful as starting points for making optimum use of the three catalysts identified for the protection of children. The report also contained recommendations on networking among the partners working towards that goal, including both Governments and non-governmental organizations. Regrettably, most countries had not yet devised an effective distribution of areas of responsibility and accountability, and most initiatives were still carried out on an ad hoc basis, with little coordination.

16. She appealed to the delegations to strengthen her position as Special Rapporteur by institutionalizing support and adequate resources for her work, which were almost entirely lacking. That problem was shared by all of the special rapporteurs on human rights issues.

17. She hoped that the United Nations system would consider children an urgent priority and send a strong message across the globe that children could not wait; that all Member States would conduct candid self-assessments to determine whether children were adequately nurtured and protected and whether adults were effectively barred from exploiting them; and that all countries could say with sincerity, before the end of the millennium, that they were making their best efforts for children.

18. **Ms. Quisumbing** (Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York Office) said she welcomed the fact that all but two States had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The goal of universal adherence had nearly been achieved. The primary responsibility for implementing the Convention lay with States parties. However, given the scope of its provisions, which encompassed civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, there was a need for cooperation with international governmental and non-governmental organizations and civil society.

19. The international community's deep concern at the exploitation of child labour was reflected in General Assembly resolution 51/77. The Secretary-General's report submitted in pursuance of the resolution (A/52/523) contained a number of proposals to improve cooperation with a view to eradicating the phenomenon. The International Conference on Child Labour currently taking place in Oslo was a step towards that end.

20. The commercial sexual exploitation of children was recognized as one of the most serious violations of children's rights. The Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had identified three institutions which could play a pivotal role in the prevention of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, or, paradoxically, its perpetuation, namely, the criminal justice system, the education system and the media. In her current report (A/52/482), she had focused on the education system and the media. Awareness of the importance of the latter had been raised by the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children held at Stockholm in 1996. Over the past year, the Special Rapporteur had made visits to a number of countries, including the United States of America, where she had examined the problem of dissemination of child pornography via the Internet.

21. The High Commissioner for Human Rights attached great importance to the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. A plan of action had been devised which would enable her Office to provide more effective support for the Committee, in particular by enhancing its assistance to States parties in meeting their reporting obligations. She urged States parties to act upon the Committee's recommendations with regard to the reform of national legislation, the establishment of national institutions for the protection of the rights of children, and the need for awareness-raising campaigns and education to disseminate the Convention more broadly. The report of the Committee (A/52/41) gave details of its work during its fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth sessions, when it had considered, *inter alia*, the rights of the girl child and of children with disabilities.

22. **Mr. Lewis** (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, with the ratification of or accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all but two States, the goal set by the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights of universal adherence had almost been achieved. More important, however, was the very real commitment of States parties to the implementation of the Convention, and its unprecedented impact on policy-making worldwide.

23. There remained, however, a number of causes for concern, which UNICEF would like to highlight. They included the continuing commercial sexual exploitation of children and the problem of child labour. With regard to the latter, he hoped that the conference currently being held in Oslo would lead to a programme of action calling for the eradication of child labour, particularly in its most exploitative and hazardous forms. If that goal were to be achieved, the provision of universal primary education would be crucial, since it provided an alternative to child labour.

24. Greater protection must be afforded children affected by armed conflict, not only those living in war zones, but also refugee and internally displaced children, child-headed families and children charged with war crimes. The use of child soldiers was the most egregious form of child labour, and he therefore called upon Member States to expedite the drafting of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the impact of armed conflict on children with a provision raising the minimum age for recruitment to 18. He further urged all countries to sign the convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines adopted in Oslo in September 1997. Moreover, the statute of the International Criminal Court which was shortly to be established must adequately reflect the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

25. In implementing the Convention, some States parties had not given adequate attention to the needs of the most vulnerable children, namely, children with disabilities, street children and indigenous children. He therefore commended the efforts of the Third Committee to focus on their plight.

26. Most important of all was the right to survival. One of the great achievements of the Convention had been the transformation of children's basic needs, in terms of health, sanitation, nutrition and education, into entitlements. Greater effort was needed, however, to tackle such problems as maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and the resurgence of malaria; as well as persistent discrimination against girls in education. Of special concern was the disparity in terms of income between the richest and poorest countries, which was exacerbated by the decline of official development assistance. Yet the Convention made it clear that the international community must render assistance to those States, particularly the developing countries, which were unable to meet adequately the needs of their children.

27. With regard to the reform of the United Nations, he hoped that the rights of children would be adequately taken into account within the proposed United Nations development-assistance framework.

28. The Committee on the Rights of the Child played a leading role in ensuring implementation of the Convention. UNICEF planned to submit to the Commission on Human Rights a synthesis of the Committee's concluding observations on the reports of the 75 countries it had examined thus far, which constituted a unique body of jurisprudence on children's rights.

29. Non-discrimination was one of the pillars of the Convention, which meant that its provisions applied to every

child, no matter how vulnerable, no matter how marginalized, irrespective of race, gender or background. He hoped that, with the implementation of the plans and programmes of action of the major international conferences and the efforts of Governments and United Nations bodies, the twenty-first century would truly be the children's century.

30. **Ms. Kirsch** (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, and also on behalf of Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, which associated themselves with her statement, said that, while she welcomed the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the expression by a number of States parties of reservations running counter to its aims and principles called into question their true commitment to its implementation. She called upon those States parties to withdraw their reservations, and urged those countries which had not already done so to accede to the Convention.

31. The European Union welcomed the work accomplished by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/52/482), and noted with satisfaction the appointment of Mr. Olara Otunnu as the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the situation of children affected by armed conflict.

32. The World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (Stockholm, 1996) had raised awareness in the international community of some of the most odious violations of children's rights, and had helped to change policies and attitudes. There must now be an effective follow-up to the Congress. The European Union, for its part, had agreed on a number of measures to strengthen judicial and police cooperation as part of a joint approach to combat crimes against children. The European Union looked forward to the completion of an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. While the primary responsibility for implementing such instruments lay with States, non-governmental organizations could contribute to their application by bringing pressure to bear upon Governments.

33. In reviewing the implementation of the Convention, special attention must be paid to the rights of children with disabilities. She therefore welcomed the request by the Economic and Social Council that the situation of disabled children should be more fully reflected in reports by States parties to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

34. It was now widely accepted that the practice of putting children to work in dangerous or exploitative conditions must be eradicated. She hoped that 1997 would be viewed as a landmark in that regard, with the holding of a number of major conferences on the subject. She urged all social actors, including politicians, the media and non-governmental organizations, to build upon the impetus generated by those events to end the scourge of child labour. As a first step, Member States should immediately halt the worst forms of child labour and enhance the protection afforded children by bringing their national legislation into line with the relevant conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Another important step would be the provision of free, universal and compulsory primary education. There was also a need to carry out a study of the phenomenon of child labour with a view to finding lasting solutions. Finally, there must be greater international cooperation, in particular through the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour.

35. Greater political will was needed to protect children caught up in armed conflicts. The international community required more information on that phenomenon, and she therefore called upon Member States to support the work of the Secretary-General's Special Representative on the situation of children affected by armed conflict. Some 30-40 per cent of the victims of anti-personnel landmines were children. In 1996, the European Union had expressed its determination to achieve the total elimination of those destructive weapons and the conclusion of an effective international agreement banning their manufacture and use. She therefore welcomed the adoption in Oslo in September 1997 of the Convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines.

36. The European Union was committed to the elimination of discrimination against girls in line with the provisions of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and called upon States to end gender discrimination in education, health care and nutrition, and to eradicate traditional practices harmful to girls.

37. Greater attention must also be paid to the plight of street children, who were often the victims of intentional ill-treatment. She urged all Governments and international organizations to enhance protection of those children.

38. Despite the recent resurgence of interest in the rights of children, there had been little tangible effect on the daily lives of most of the world's children. It was not enough simply to adopt legislation setting forth children's rights. True change would come about only through the establishment of conditions conducive to the enjoyment of those rights. While the primary responsibility lay with

Governments, the international community must lend Member States the support they required to implement the Convention fully.

39. **Mr. Harkin** (United States of America) said that abusive and exploitative child labour was more than just a humanitarian issue, since it also had development, legal and ethical dimensions. Social development was essential for sustainable development. Countries that failed to provide their children with an education were ensuring that their future adult workforce would be ill-equipped to fulfil their individual ambitions and participate in an integrated global economy. Millions of children around the world were forced to perform arduous and dangerous labour for the commercial gain of others. In spite of international conventions and national laws prohibiting exploitative forms of child labour, that practice was widely indulged in and reaped millions of dollars in profit in the globalized system of international commerce.

40. Most of the forced or involuntary labour to which children were subjected was not found in export industries. The parties principally responsible for exploiting children were adults in their own homelands. His Government had already acted to combat child labour and supported the multilateral efforts by international agencies in that area. The United States had taken a special interest in the work of the ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour to which it had contributed over $5 million in the past three years, and looked forward to the adoption of a new ILO convention on child labour to be considered in 1998. His country had enacted legislation to end American complicity in international profit-making in goods produced through forced or indentured child labour by barring the import of those goods. He urged all concerned members of the international community to help that effort succeed.

41. **Mr. Andjaba** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), expressed the hope that the universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be achieved in the near future. The SADC countries welcomed the recent adoption of the convention prohibiting anti-personnel mines since southern Africa was infested with millions of deadly mines. He appealed to those countries that had the capacity to do so to support generously the Community's efforts to make the region a landmine-free zone.

42. According to United Nations estimates, 1.3 billion people were trapped in absolute poverty and their numbers were growing in every region of the world. In addition, aid to developing countries had fallen in 1996 to an all-time low. That situation constituted a major threat to the lives of children and the communities in which they lived. Without adequate flows of development aid, the elimination of poverty and the creation of an environment for sustainable economic growth would remain elusive goals. Official development assistance should be increased to set up the necessary economic and social infrastructures vital for development. The decline in resources for development had major implications for the gains that developing countries had achieved thus far, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa.

43. The children of the African continent continued to experience an enormous amount of suffering. Efforts should be increased to support the progress that Africa had made, with particular attention to health and nutrition, education, water supply and sanitation, gender disparity, malaria, HIV/AIDS and the protection of the most vulnerable children. The scourge of HIV/AIDS was of great concern to the SADC countries. They had adopted a plan of action to deal with the disease, which was spreading rapidly and killing and orphaning millions of children all over the world.

44. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank had signed a memorandum of understanding to support the countries of sub-Saharan Africa in their efforts to promote access to safe water, environmental sanitation and hygiene education. Such innovative initiatives were commendable, particularly in view of the challenges that lay ahead.

45. It was estimated that, throughout the world, over 250 million children were working, both in developed and developing countries. Those children were often subjected to hazardous forms of labour, and many of them were denied education and were trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. He noted with concern the large number of children who were physically and/or mentally disabled as a result of poverty, disease, forced labour and other forms of violence. Governments should pay special attention to children with disabilities and ensure that they enjoyed the highest physical and mental health as well as equal access to education. In spite of various international commitments and legal obligations, girls were treated as inferior to boys in many parts of the world. The question of the girl child had a special place in the Committee's deliberations and the draft resolution on it should not be merged with the omnibus resolution on the item under consideration.

46. **Ms. Moreno** (Paraguay), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group of countries, expressed concern at the situation of millions of children throughout the world resulting from adverse social and economic conditions, poverty, armed conflict, labour exploitation, and child prostitution and child

pornography. She noted with satisfaction the number of States that had ratified or acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and underscored the important work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. States parties should fully cooperate with that Committee, especially in implementing its recommendations. It should also have the necessary staff and facilities to carry out its functions effectively. In that connection, she stressed that States parties to the Convention should accept the amendment to paragraph 2 of article 43 of the Convention, which would increase the membership of the Committee from 10 to 18.

47. The countries of the Rio Group had always attached the greatest importance to the protection of children and actively participated in regional and national conferences and activities in that regard. They considered that the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted by the World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996 were an important contribution to efforts to eradicate those practices. Their Governments were adopting the necessary measures to implement the recommendations of the Congress.

48. She expressed the Group's support for the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which was a valuable contribution to the promotion and protection of the rights of children. The Group also fully supported the work of the working group on the elaboration of a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and looked forward to further progress. The States members of the Rio Group underscored the urgent need to alleviate the suffering of children caught up in armed conflicts and urged all countries to protect refugee and internally displaced children.

49. Governments, in cooperation with international and non-governmental organizations, should take the necessary measures to eliminate customs and practices that discriminated against and harmed girl children.

50. She noted with satisfaction the increased attention that the Committee on the Rights of the Child was giving to the rights of children with disabilities and reaffirmed the Group's support for the work of UNICEF in promoting and protecting the rights of the child.

51. **Mr. Fulci** (Italy) welcomed the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children.

52. While the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been almost universally accepted (with the notable exception of the United States of America), greater awareness of its provisions and of the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child was crucial. He called for greater emphasis on training on children's rights, and for all necessary resources to enable the Committee - of which he was a member - to perform its tasks. The Committee had recently held a discussion on ways to protect the rights of disabled children, and its recommendations would be further discussed by a working group with a view to drafting a plan of action on the topic.

53. He called on all Governments to sign and ratify the convention on the prohibition of anti-personnel mines adopted in Oslo in September 1997, as well as to address the impact on children of other conventional weapons. He reiterated his proposal that humanitarian mine clearance should be integrated into all peacekeeping operations, and emphasized that countries and companies that reaped profit from the sale of mines should be required to contribute funds for humanitarian mine clearance and mine-awareness programmes. Specific programmes were needed to mitigate the effects of mine-derived disabilities on children; in particular, extended medical treatment, rehabilitation and psycho-social support should be provided for mine victims and their families.

54. Italy was deeply committed to the welfare of children and their full enjoyment of the rights granted by the Convention. Under the Government's plan of action for children and adolescents, a broad range of legislative, administrative and cultural measures was being taken. Such measures included recently approved legislation promoting children's rights and opportunities and increasing penalties for the sexual exploitation of minors.

55. **Mr. Wissa** (Egypt) said it was gratifying that the goal of universal adherence to the Convention on the Rights of the Child had almost been reached. Egypt had been one of the first countries to ratify that Convention, and the Government's concern for the issues involved was reflected in the establishment of a National Mother and Child Council, and in the support given to relevant national non-governmental organizations. His country had taken a number of measures to protect children, such as prohibiting their employment in hazardous work, setting a minimum age for admission to employment and regulating the hours of employment.

56. Some current attempts to address the issue of child labour were too superficial. The problem was related to the degree of wealth in a society and the extent to which that society could develop. Many children in poor societies worked in order to help their families to survive. Denying

children the opportunity to work could expose them to even greater dangers, force them on to the streets or into a life of crime. The issue could only be dealt with gradually, through the elimination of poverty, the provision of support for vulnerable families and the promotion of education. It was important for ILO and UNICEF to continue to cooperate with developing countries in that regard. Egypt had made its position clear at a number of international conferences: any attempt to create a link between respect for basic employment standards and international trade using the pretext of children's rights must be resisted; proper training must be available for children who had dropped out of school, in order to harness their potential, and donor countries must be asked to assist in funding such training programmes.

57. His country attached great importance to the elaboration of the optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and to the involvement of children in armed conflict. The establishment of a minimum age for compulsory military service would be a significant gain for future generations in every society. His delegation welcomed the appointment of the Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children.

58. Children living in areas under foreign occupation and in situations of armed conflict needed special protection. Egypt called for a halt to the military activities that threatened the lives of civilians. In Africa and occupied Arab territories, including Palestine and Lebanon, an enormous number of children had fallen victim to acts of violence. He called upon all Member States to support development in Africa, where many children experienced poverty, hunger and instability. Securing children's basic needs would be the first step towards ensuring respect for the rights of the child in Africa and the rest of the world.

59. **Ms. Sugimori** (Japan) said that Japan welcomed the opening of ILO negotiations on a new convention on the most intolerable forms of child labour, and also noted with pleasure the recent holding of several international conferences on child labour in different parts of the world. In order to address that issue, Governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other actors in civil society must cooperate in the areas of social mobilization, education, and developing and enforcing appropriate legislation. In its development-cooperation policy, Japan attached great importance to education and provided assistance to developing countries in formulating educational programmes, especially those targeting the needs of street children. It also supported UNICEF efforts to implement educational projects for girls in several developing countries.

60. She called for greater efforts to provide children with humanitarian assistance, protection and rehabilitation in situations of armed conflict. She urged Governments, international bodies and non-governmental organizations to take the necessary measures, in line with the guidelines adopted at the recent Tokyo conference on anti-personnel landmines, to reduce the number of mine victims.

61. Japan welcomed the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children. With regard to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, it was important to enhance awareness of the rights of the child and to implement controls in accordance with national laws. Following the 1996 Stockholm World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, the Government of Japan, in cooperation with UNICEF, had launched a campaign to raise awareness of the issue in its various aspects, including sex tourism. Japan continued to take an active role in combating sex tourism through implementation of national legislation and international cooperation.

62. **Mr. Lian** (Norway) said that Norway placed great importance on children's rights. The establishment of the Children's Ombudsman in 1981 and the post of Minister for Children's and Family Affairs in 1989 had been of great value in efforts to secure continued development for the benefit of children in Norway. The Government had also recently decided to incorporate the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national law.

63. The Government was also dedicated to directing bilateral development cooperation towards alleviating poverty, a major cause of infringement of children's rights, and supported the 20/20 initiative to ensure that development cooperation focused on basic social needs, including those of children. Norway had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child without reservation, and called on other nations to do so as well.

64. He urged Governments to act on the Agenda for Action adopted at the International Conference on Child Labour, held in Oslo in October 1997, through continued international cooperation, and expressed the hope that the Conference would serve to place child labour issues higher on the international agenda. The Norwegian Government had already pledged nearly $28 million in additional assistance over the next three years for development programmes to combat child labour.

65. Norway welcomed the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children, and called for inter-agency cooperation and collaboration with non-governmental organizations in that field. It was also committed to success in the negotiations on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and on a draft optional protocol related to the involvement of children in armed conflict.

66. **Ms. Reynolds** (Australia) urged the very small number of States which had not yet ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so as soon as possible, and reiterated Australia's firm commitment to protecting and implementing children's rights, as reflected in its first periodic report, recently submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Government would give careful consideration to the Committee's recommendations in such areas as minimum ages in respect of employment and criminal responsibility, the situation of indigenous children and youth homelessness.

67. In addition to action at the national level, Australia was taking joint action at the regional and international levels to tackle such cross-border problems as trafficking, child sex tourism and child pornography. The Australian Foreign Minister had recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the Foreign Secretary of the Philippines on joint action to combat child sexual abuse and other serious crime. The memorandum would complement action already being taken against child sexual abuse, including legislation enabling the Australian legal system to prosecute Australians for conduct occurring outside Australia. The Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID) was also providing various forms of assistance to developing countries for tackling the sexual exploitation of children.

68. Australia was developing a national agenda for action against the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and strongly supported the work on a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. It regretted that the work had been slowed down by differing views regarding the scope of the protocol. In Australia's view, the scope should be confined to sexual exploitation, in order to avoid duplication with other international activities and instruments.

69. Australia welcomed the appointment of the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General to study the impact of armed conflict on children. As a strong supporter of the elaboration of an optional protocol to the Convention related to children in armed conflict, Australia had been disappointed by the lack of progress in the working group, and urged it to make every effort to complete the drafting of the protocol at its next session.

70. Australia also looked forward to the adoption by ILO in 1999 of a new convention dealing specifically with hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour. That instrument, together with the elaboration of voluntary codes of conduct involving industry, international agencies and local communities, augured well for more effective action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

71. **Mr. Ferrer Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that the Committee on the Rights of the Child should periodically evaluate its working methods in order to ensure the necessary atmosphere of cooperation in monitoring the implementation of the Convention by States parties. Children were subject to serious dangers in all parts of the world. Child prostitution and pornography and the use of child labour continued to exist. The proliferation of armed conflicts, which weapons exported from the industrialized countries had made even more destructive, had had a traumatic effect on the lives of millions of children, resulting in death, mutilation and homelessness. National efforts to promote and protect the rights of children must be accompanied by a new philosophy of international solidarity in order to provide further resources to assist developing countries in that regard. Cuba hoped that the obstacles impeding the adoption of the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child could be overcome in order to strengthen the international legal framework in that area.

72. In the past 37 years, his country had given special attention to promoting and protecting the rights of the child, with the active participation of the population and assistance from various specialized agencies. The ongoing blockade of Cuba by the United States and the sudden halting of the favourable relations with the former Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe had not impeded progress in programmes for the benefit of children. Through free and universal education and health care, Cuba had achieved high levels of school attendance and a low rate of child mortality.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.